

Vital Records Program Summary

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13 December 1967

MEMORANDUM FOR: Chief, Records Administration Branch

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FROM :

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SUBJECT :

Improvement of Vital Records Program

1. This paper is presented to you in answer to your request for my views on the Agency Vital Records Program.

2. Executive Order #10346, issued by President Truman in April 1952, made it mandatory that each Federal Agency establish a Records Protection Program that would permit the carrying on of its essential operations during a period of emergency. It was very easy for us to comply with this as our "Vital Materials Program" had its beginning in 1948, as part of the overall Emergency Relocation Plan. This plan resulted in the selection and establishment of a relocation site presumed to be a safe distance from a critical target area (Washington). This was consistent with the then current policy for Evacuation of essential personnel as prescribed by the Office of Civil Defense and Mobilization.

3. This was also consistent with the following recommendations of the Hoover Commission Task Force Report on Paperwork Management:

"The proper functioning of government in time of emergency will depend on the Survival and Availability of Vital Records. The Office of Defense Mobilization should assure that Agency relocation plans and Vital Records Programs are closely coordinated. Also, the Program should be extended to principal offices outside the Washington area."

4. Basically this philosophy has not changed. Survival plans must be Total. They must include the following three (3) essentials:

1. Availability of emergency relocation personnel
2. Protection and availability of Vital Records
3. Availability of essential emergency facilities
(Provision must be made to include machines and equipment to facilitate the use of those records in any form other than paper copy)

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The absence of any one of these essentials would jeopardize our Emergency operation, so important to the National Security of our country.

5. Since the issuance of these guidelines, as established by OCDM, great scientific and technical advances have been made that imperil our Emergency Program. The production of intercontinental ballistic missiles and the ensuing effects of fallout could make our present relocation site inoperative. It is also very unlikely, due to the significant reduction in warning time, that our emergency personnel would reach relocation. In addition, GSA Regional Bulletin FPMR -3-A-12 published 29 June 1967, instructs us to seek shelter as best we can, and implies that evacuation is a thing of the past due to short warning and increased danger from fallout. If this is the thinking of the nation's Emergency Planning Officials then I feel that the "Total Survival" program of this Agency should be reviewed immediately.

6. Providing for a total emergency program is similar to purchasing insurance. There are many different types of coverage, but when we are insuring the Nation's Security we must subscribe to a total, all-inclusive type of program that will simultaneously provide all three essential elements; people, records, and facilities.

7. I realize that a "Total Program" will prove very costly, but there are some ways that such a program could partially pay its keep. With this in mind, I'd like to suggest that each of the following recommendations be considered for possible adoption and implementation:

- a. Construction of an underground vault at Langley using the hill immediately behind the Headquarters building.

The protection afforded by the natural terrain plus providing additional protection through lining the walls and ceilings with layers of concrete, lead, etc., should permit us to withstand an attack on our Nation's capital and protect against resulting fallout. The construction of this facility should provide sufficient space to accommodate a cadre of highly essential workers with minimum living quarters. In addition, equipment commensurate with the type of records and office operation (ADP, EDP, Microfilm, photo interpretation, etc.) should be placed in this facility. Because of its proximity to our main building this facility could be used productively in fulfillment of the day to day peace time operations of our Agency, thereby providing gainful utilization. A tunnel, linking the main building with this underground

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site, would assure us that our people, records, and equipment would be brought together at time of need. In the event of a night attack we would at least have our night headquarters force, who should be trained to support our essential emergency operations.

- b. The relocating of an Agency office to [REDACTED] and the construction of an underground vault in the hill at [REDACTED]

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This could be accomplished through the selection of an Agency office that could carry on its day to day peace time operations at [REDACTED]. In selecting this Agency component, consideration should be given to an activity that uses machinery (EDP, ADP, Microfilm, photo interpretation, etc.) that would be needed to permit maximum utilization of all Vital Records (tapes, photos, films, etc.) stored for emergency operations. The personnel manning this "field operation" would naturally be specialists in performing the day to day work for their parent office, but be trained as generalists in overall Agency emergency operations.

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8. The adoption of either of the above recommendations should assure the simultaneous availability of people, records, and equipment. Implementation of either recommendation would require time. However, I submit two additional recommendations that, if accepted, would provide immediate improvement in the records portion of our Total Program:

- a. Establish a better liaison between Agency Emergency Planning Officers and Records Officers.

Records Officers cannot select Vital Records until they have been thoroughly briefed in the Emergency Mission of their Office. Further, the Records Officer can be very helpful in informing his E. P. O. of the need for special equipment necessary to obtain maximum utilization of the relocated records. At the present time we have, at relocation, records essential to emergency operations that cannot be used because of the lack of special equipment.

- b. All records that have been selected as Vital should be maintained in a special area, separate and distinct from other records.

A Vital Record should not serve as the Record or Archival copy. It should, in all instances, be an extra copy of an essential document set aside for use at time of emergency. To have a copy of a record serve a dual

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purpose (Archival and Vital) fragments the Program. Continuation of this could prove very disastrous if a period of emergency should arise. Dual usage of the record is a clear case of false economy when we weigh the inconsequential monetary savings realized against the inability to have the Vital Records immediately accessible at time of need. It is very possible that a situation may arise that would require that all Vital Records be moved to a more protective area. If this happened it could be very easily accomplished if the Vital Records are stored separately, but could be chaotic if they had to be individually selected from the mass of retired or archival records holdings. In fact this was one of the problems given to this Agency by OCDM in the 1956 Operation Alert. In addition, this dual purpose could greatly weaken our responsibility under the Federal Records Act of 1950 to preserve, for historical purposes, (not part of a Vital Records Program) those records that document the activities and operations of this Agency.

9. I would like the opportunity to discuss the recommendations of this paper with you. I have discussed my views with persons who have had considerable experience in the field of Vital Records work and they are in agreement that successful Survival requires a Total Program.

10. I have always advocated the concept of a "Total Survival Program" and am pleased to see that the Office of Civil Defense has finally released a very good motion picture titled "Memorandum to Industry" that vividly illustrates this point.

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